DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 478 CG 022 801

AUTHOR Carmichael, Karla D.
TITLE Birth Order and Maladaptive Behavior in School-Aged Children.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Disorders; *Behavior Problems; *Birth Order; Comparative Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; Family (Sociological Unit); Family Characteristics; Family Status; *Family Structure; Problem Children; Student Behavior
IDENTIFIERS Adler (Alfred)

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Alfred Adler's theories on the effect of birth order on maladaptive behavior in children, this study focused on the relationship between birth order and the referral to counseling of school-aged children with maladaptive disorder. School-aged children (N=217) with academic or behavioral problems, ages 5 to 18, were referred to the staff of a regional interdisciplinary center for evaluation during a 5-year period. Each child was evaluated by specialists in each of the three disciplines represented in the center: (1) speech, language, and hearing; (2) reading; and (3) counseling. On the basis of staff recommendations, the subjects were placed in either a counseling group (Group I) or a no-counseling group (Group II), and designated either first-born, middle-born, or last-born. Data on family structure (intact, single-parent, and blended); parents' family background; socioeconomic status; and number, age, and sex of siblings were also gathered. All predictors were simultaneously entered into a multiple regression equation for stepwise analysis. Although none of the predictors was found to vary significantly, the study results support previous findings that more males and first born students are referred to clinics for behavior and academic problems. A unique formula for family density is presented, and recommendations for further study and refinement of birth order studies are offered. References are included. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED323478

BIRTH ORDER AND MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Karla D. Carmichael

Sul Ross State University

CG022801

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Karla D. Carmichael

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT

A study of 217 school-aged children with academic and/or behavior problems, who were referred to and evaluated by an interdisciplinary staff, is presented in relation to their birth order. Although the study was found to not be significantly (p .05) to profile the clinically referred student, the study did support the previous findings of the literature that more males and first born students are referred to clinics for remediation of behavior problems and academic problems. A formula for family density is presented that is unique to this study. Recommendations for further study and refinement of birth order studies are presented.

BIRTH ORDER AND MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Alfred Adler made a primary contribution to psychology by pointing out the effects of birth order on personality (Mosak, 1969). He pointed out the high probabilities that children born in certain birth order positions would demonstrate specific personality characteristics and how those characteristics were affected by such factors as being the only child of a sex among other sex siblings, being sickly or retarded, being born after the death of a predecessor, or being born after a long period of time between siblings. Therefore, Adler's construct of birth order was not one of ordinal position alone, but one of psychological position within the family constellation (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Dreikurs, 1954, 1972; Adler, 1928).

The implications of the effects of birth order on maladaptive behavior in children were first expressed by Adler (1931), when he wrote that due to their sense of deprivation of affection and loss of status after the arrival of the second child, first-borns were most often seen in guidance clinics. Adler's birth order construct has led to over 766 studies of birth order since 1963 (Miley, 1969; Vockell, Felker, & Miley, 1973; Forer, 1977). These studies have failed to consistently support the theory that birth order is related to personality characteristics (Havassey-DeAvila, 1971), and only limited research has investigated the relationship between birth order and maladaptive behavior in school-aged children (Miley, 1969; Vockell, Felker, & Miley, 1973, Forer, 1977). Studies have, however, clearly demonstrated that first-born males are more likely to be referred to guidance clinics than their second-born, last-born or female siblings (Rosenow, 1930; Peskin, Giora, & Kaffman, 1974).

Criticisms of previous birth order studies have pointed to researchers' failure to control for the important variables related to birth order, as proposed by Adler. Previous studies have looked at birth order as if it were merely ordinal position, omitting Adler's concern for the various aspects of the family atmosphere. The variables generally neglected in these studies are sex of subjects, family density, age of subject, sex of siblings, family size, socioeconomic status, intactness of family, and age of mother (Schooler, 1972; Gandy, 1974; Manaster, 1977).

This study was designed to include aspects of Adler's psychological construct of birth order that often have been omitted in other studies, and to focus on the relationship between birth order and the referral to counseling of school-aged children with maladaptive behavior.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 217 school-aged children with academic and/or behavior problems, who were referred to and evaluated by the staff of a regional interdisciplinary center during a five year period. Children in this study were between the ages of 5.0 and 18.0 years of age and received an evaluation from each of the three disciplines represented in the center: speech, language and hearing, reading, and counseling.

The sample is unique in that each child was screened by specialists in each of the three disciplines and an interdisciplinary team staffing before recommendations for specific remediation were made. The counseling component of the center espoused an Adlerian orientation toward child/family assessment and counseling.

The geographical area from which the clinical population was drawn included both rural and urban areas made up of farms, ranches, and small

communities. The population was from a wide range of social, cultural, socio-economic status and ethnic backgrounds (Smith & Wilborn, 1977).

Procedures

On the basis of interdisciplinary staff recommendations, the subjects were placed in either the counseling group (Group I) or in the no-counseling group (Group II). The records of the individual children in each group were examined. The age, sex, ordinal position of the subject, family size, intactness of the family, age of the mother and sex of siblings were obtained from a Background Information form completed by the child's parent.

The children were designated either first-born, middle-born, or last-born. Twins were classified according to their position in relation to other children in the family, as if theirs were a single birth. Only children were classified as first-born. All children that were not first- or last-born were designated as middle-born.

The family density figure was generated by subtracting the age of the youngest child listed as a member of the subject's family from the age of the oldest child listed as a member of the subject's family. The resultant numeral was divided by the total number of children listed as members of the family and that figure was used to represent the number of children born per year.

The socioeconomic status of the subjects was determined from the occupation of the head of the household, using the North Hatt Social Status Scale (Reiss, 1961; Blau & Duncan, 1967). If the parents or legal guardians of the subject were separated or divorced, the socioeconomic status was based on the job title of the parent who currently had custody of the child. In cases where both parents were employed and living together, the head of the household was considered to be the father.

Family size data and mother's age were taken from the Background Information form. Family size was determined by including parent(s) and child(ren), who were listed as part of the family. The mother's age was her age at the time of the referral of the child to the center.

Three categories were used to describe the structure of the family from which the client came. An intact family was one with both natural parents living in the home. Not intact families were those in which the child was living with only one parent. Blended families were those in which a step-parent or a step-sibling was present.

The sex of siblings was reported in four categories, which reflect both age spacing and sex of siblings. The sibling relationships described were: sibling of the same sex less than two years older/younger than the subject, sibling of the other sex less than two years older/younger, sibling more than two years older/younger than the subject, and no sibling. If subjects had more than one sibling within a classification, only one sibling was recorded, the sibling closest in age to the subject.

Results and Discussion

All of the predictors were simultaneously entered into the multiple regression equation for a stepwise analysis. Although none of the predictors was significant ($p < .05$), family density and same sex sibling less than two years older/younger than the subject appeared to be the best predictors, as shown in Table 1. Because of the small amount of variance existing between the predictor variables in the counseling and no-counseling groups, continuation of the analysis was meaningless.

Table 1

Correlations of Predictors Included in the Analysis

Predictors	Multiple R	R-Squared	Beta Weights
Family density	.85	.72	2.13
Same sex sibling	.95	.89	-2.40

Although this study did not provide significant findings, it attempted to answer criticisms that birth order studies have not examined the interplay of variables (Schooler, 1972; Gandy, 1974; Manaster, 1977) such as sibling age and sex, family density, and socioeconomic factors. The list of variables provided in the literature, when considered simultaneously in an equation, is statistically cumbersome and greatly reduces the amount of variance to be measured. However, family density and predictors reflecting the sibling age-sex relationship to the subject appear to be worth further investigation.

As in other birth order studies (Koch, 1955, 1956; Peskin, Giora, & Kaffman, 1974; Rosenow, 1930), males outnumbered the females in this study and first-borns were more prevalant than any other birth order. Price and Hare (1970) have pointed out that this phenomenon may be indicative of population trends rather than reflective of a clinical population bias. However, the pheonomenon does hold across different cultures (Peskin, Giora, & Kaffman, 1974) and across time in spite of changing family trends (Rosenow, 1930; Koch, 1955, 1956; Peskin, et al., 1974). The question seems to be not whether this phenomenon is an observed fact or not, but rather, what more does an observation have to do to become a fact.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this study is to provide direction and validation to the criticism that birth order should not be studied in

isolation, but rather in conjunction with other family constellation variables. More specifically, the results of this study indicate that birth order should be studied further in relationship to sibling relationships and family density. As Adams (1972) challenged, ". . . the current state of these researches is such to call not for abandonment but for refinement and further testing" (p. 418).

References

Adams, B. Birth order: A critical review. Sociometry, 1972, 35, 411-439.

Adler, A. Characteristics of first, second, and third born child. Children, 1928, 3, 52.

Adler, A. Problems of neurosis (P. Marsh, Ed. and Trans.). New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1930.

Ansbacher, H. & Ansbacher, R. (Eds.). The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler. New York: Basic Books, 1956.

Blau, P. & Duncan, O. The American occupation structure. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967.

Dreikurs, R. The psychological interview in medicine. American Journal of Individual Psychology, 1954, 10, 99-102.

Dreikurs, R. Coping with children's misbehavior: A parent's guide. New York: Hawthorne Books, 1972.

Forer, L. Bibliography of birth order literature in the 70s. Journal of Individual Psychology, 1977, 33, 70-77.

Gandy, G. Ordinal position research related to vocational interest. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1974, 21, 281-287.

Havassey-DeVila, B. A critical review of the approach to birth order research. Canadian Psychologist, 1971, 12, 282-305.

Koch, H. The relation of certain family constellation characteristics to the attitudes of children toward adults. Child Development, 1955, 26, 21-39.

Koch, H. Some emotional attitudes of the young child in relation to characteristics of his siblings. Child Development, 1956, 27, 393-426.

Manaster, G. Birth order: An overview. Journal of Individual Psychology, 1977, 33, 3-8.

Miley, C. Birth order research 1963-1967: Bibliography and index. Journal of Individual Psychology, 1969, 25, 64-70.

Mosak, H. Early recollections: Evaluation of some recent research. Journal of Individual Psychology, 1969, 25, 56-59.

Peskin, H., Giora, Z., & Kaffman, M. Birth order in child-psychiatric referrals and kibbutz family structure. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1974, 36, 615-618.

Price, J. & Hare, E. Birth rank in schizophrenia: With a consideration of the bias due to changes in birth rate. British Journal of Psychiatry, 1970, (116), 409-420.

Reiss, A. Occupations and social status. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

Rosenow, C. The incident of first-born among problem children. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1930, 37, 145-151.

Schooler, C. Birth order effects: Not here, not now! Psychological Bulletin, 1972, 78, 161-175.

Smith, D. & Wilborn, B. Specific predictors of learning difficulties. Academic Therapy, 1977, 12, 471-477.

Vockell, E., Felker, D., & Miley, C. Birth order literature 1967-1971: Bibliography and index. Journal of Individual Psychology, 1973, 29, 39-53.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 21,1991